

ajnAna in sushupti as per Naishkarmya Siddhi

The journey towards mOksha of an ordinary human being starts when he appreciates that he is in bondage. MOksha means freedom. Freedom from what? Freedom from bondage. I am imprisoned and I seek freedom. If someone does not understand that he is imprisoned, how can he desire freedom? So, the first and foremost step in the journey to mOksha is appreciation of the existing bondage. To appreciate that I am bound. To appreciate that I am imprisoned. That fear and desire throttle me. That they don't let me breathe.

How to deeply realise that I am bound is itself a big issue. This bondage is so deep rooted, and so pervaded in our day-to-day activities, that it has become routine.

However, when one realises his bondage, he enquires - how should I get freedom.

He analyses his bondage. And with a dispassionate analysis, coupled with sharp intelligence, he arrives at the conclusion - this bondage is a product of ignorance. That it is a product of ajnAna.

And then, knowing that only jnAna can remove ajnAna, he approaches a shrOtriya Brahma-nishTha teacher from whom he does shravaNa of mahAvAkya. And then with manana and nididhyAsana, the pratibandhaka are removed and apratibaddha-shravaNa then leads to mukti.

This is the scheme of advaita vedAnta propounded in Upanishads.

One of the most important prakaraNa grantha which contains the crux of the entire VedAnta is Naishkarmya Siddhi. We will have a brief overview of the text to familiarize everyone and to evoke curiosity about this rather less-talked-about grantha. Subsequently, we will take a specific topic related to ajnAna in sushupti which is subject to much confusion among sincere seekers of advaita.

Overview of Naishkarmya Siddhi

Naishkarmya Siddhi is a text written by Sureshwaracharya, who was a disciple of Adi Shankaracharya. His other famous texts are BrihadAraNyaka Upanishad BhAshya VArtika and TaittirIya Upanishad BhAshya VArtika. He is also addressed as VArtikakAra in advaita tradition.

Naishkarmya Siddhi is a prakaraNa grantha. AchArya Himself says in the first chapter that this grantha is अशेष-वेदान्त-सार-संग्रह. That means, this text contains the summary of the entire VedAnta. VedAnta means Upanishads. VArtikakAra, in the very beginning of this text, explains that this text deals with anartha, anartha-hetu, purushArtha and purushArtha-hetu. Anartha refers to ajnAna-kArya, anartha-hetu refers to ajnAna, purushArtha refers to mOksha whereas purushArtha-hetu refers to jnAna. So, we can see that this is what is basically अशेष-वेदान्त-सार-संग्रह. Nothing is left out if ajnAna, ajnAna-kArya, jnAna and mOksha are covered.

We are also blessed with a commentary BhAva-Tattva-PrakAshikA on Naishkarmya Siddhi by Chitsukhacharya, the celebrated writer of ChitsukhI or Tattva-pradIpikA. While ChitsukhI makes extensive use of Navya-NyAya language, BhAva-Tattva-PrakAshikA brings out the purport of Naishkarmya Siddhi without using the *prima facie* intimidating language of Navya-NyAya. This commentary is an absolute must if one wants to understand Naishkarmya Siddhi in accordance with advaita sampradAya.

We are also blessed with a Hindi translation of the text by स्वामी प्रज्ञानानन्द सरस्वती जी. The book is published by Dakshinamurti Math and it is an authoritative and reliable commentary.

Naishkarmya Siddhi is divided into four chapters. First chapter deals with how only jnAna is the means to mOksha and not anything else. JnAna-karma-samuchchaya or karma as a means to mOksha is negated in this chapter. It can also be called मोक्ष-निरूपणात्मक-अध्याय. While karma is required for purifying the antah-karaNa and for ensuring the yogyatA for jnAna-nishTha, being avidyA-kArya, it is not contradictory to ajnAna. Only jnAna is contradictory to ajnAna and hence can lead to its removal.

Second chapter deals with elaboration of Atma-anAtmA-viveka and exposition of tvam-padArtha in the mahAvAkya tat-tvam-asi. The idea of this chapter is to cultivate vairAgya through Atma-anAtmA-viveka so that one becomes qualified to receive the knowledge from the mahAvAkya.

Third chapter deals with analysis of mahAvAkya such as tat-tvam-asi and aham-brahm-asmi. This chapter also describes ajnAna in a very conceptual manner. Our discussion today will concentrate on this.

Finally, the fourth chapter is a summary of the previous three chapters. It describes sadyO-mukti and jIvan-mukti also and explains that this work Naishkarmya Siddhi is in line with sampradAya. The text quotes extensively from Upadesha SAhasrI, which is a text authored by Shankaracharya.

Scheme of Naishkarmya Siddhi

As per Naishkarmya Siddhi, the journey to mOksha begins with Atma-anAtma-viveka. While it is clear to everyone that whatever is different from the body such as table, chair, room, tree are anAtmA i.e. non-self, he himself is AtmA i.e. Self. He addresses himself as I and as myself. He never confuses a table and chair as his Self. This anAtmatva of anAtmA is proved by pramANAs such as pratyaksha, anumAna. He refers to anAtmA as “this” and to AtmA as “I”.

However, with respect to body and mind, he sometimes refers to them as “this”, and sometimes as “I”. Like “my spoon”, he would refer to the body as “my body” and thus treat it as “this”. While at other times, he would say “I am tall” when it is actually the body that is tall.

Thus he confuses and mixes AtmA and anAtmA. AchArya says that through anvaya and vyatireka, one should clearly understand that everything starting from buddhi, body upto the entire world is anAtmA and drishya whereas the AtmA is drashTA. How? Because in sushupti, in deep sleep, there is no anAtmA in the form of ajnAna-kArya present but AtmA is present. This single illustration of sushupti is enough to explain the sharp contrast between AtmA and anAtmA being ajnAna-kArya.

However, and this is a big however, by this AtmA-anAtmA-viveka, Naishkarmya Siddhi says, it is impossible to have mOksha. Why? Because this AtmA-anAtmA-viveka needs anAtmA, it is inextricably linked to anAtmA. It retains duality. It feeds on the samsAra-bIja, which is ajnAna. AchArya emphasises that one who wants to get mOksha from this Atma-anAtma-viveka is like a rabbit, who thinks that by closing his eyes, he will be freed from the imminent danger in the form of an eagle.

So, what is the next step? The next step is VedAnta i.e. mahAvAkya-shravaNa. Atma-anAtma-viveka can be done through anumAna. Anyone who is sufficiently intelligent and observes his three states, can easily do the Atma-anAtma-viveka. However, he remains in bondage. It must be mentioned, however, Atma-anAtma-viveka has a tremendous result. It gives vairAgya from anAtmA. One is no longer interested in anAtmA. This disinterest in anAtmA leads to purity of antah-karaNa. He is not a slave to his body and mind. He has purified his antah-karaNa. And now he becomes eligible for jnAna. This jnAna arises from listening to mahAvAkya. And with manana and

nididhyAsana, the pratibandhaka in the form of asambhAvanA and viparIta-bhAvanA are removed. And thus, from apratibaddha-sharvaNa, one accomplishes the ultimate goal of life, i.e. mOksha.

What is the mechanism

The mechanism is this. JnAna arising from mahAvAkya removes ajnAna. Now, the entire anAtmA, being ajnAna-kArya, is also removed when ajnAna is removed. The removal of ajnAna results in an understanding that there never has been any ajnAna. That there has always been the singular non-dual AtmA.

Discussion on ajnAna

The question, therefore, arises as to what is this ajnAna. Where does it reside? What is it about? What is its nature? Fine, it is removed by jnAna, but how exactly? What is the proof that it is present in the first place!!

The entire VedAnta becomes useful because it promises to remove ajnAna, which is the source of this perceived duality and sorrow, from which everyone wants to move away.

AchArya uses various words to refer to ajnAna such as mOha, avidyA, ajnAna, Atma-anavabOdha etc. However, he is certain that ajnAna is the material cause of the entire anAtmA.

Why? Why exactly should ajnAna be the material cause of this anAtmA. Because it is proved by logic. What is the logic: everything is seen. Like an illusory snake. And hence, it is ajnAna-kArya. In technical language, विमतं अज्ञान-कार्यम्, दृश्यत्वात्, रज्जु-सर्पवत्.

Even AtmA-anavabOdha also has ajnAna as upAdAna. AchArya makes the statement in second chapter, 99th shLOka - अनवगमात्कत्वं च मोहमात्रोपादानत्वात् । In VArtika, he has clearly said - अस्य द्वैतेन्द्रजालस्य यदुपादानकारणम् । अज्ञानं तदुपाश्रित्य ब्रह्म कारणमुच्यते ।

Now, all pramANa-prameya-vyavahAra is a product of ajnAna. So, certainly, logically, ajnAna cannot be known by any pramANa. That is obvious. So, how is it known? The answer is - it is not known by pramAtA, which is a product of avidyA. Rather, ajnAna is known by sAkshI. sAkshI is defined as avidyA-upahita-chaitanya.

This sAkshI, without the requirement of pramANa or antah-karaNa, knows ajnAna directly.

What is the proof? Our natural intrinsic day-to-day experience itself is the proof. We say - “अहमज्ञः, मामन्यं च न जानामि”, “त्वदुक्तम् अर्थम् अहं न जानामि” and also .. “एतावन्तं कालं सुखम् अहम् अस्वाप्सम्, न किञ्चिद् अवेदिषम्”. These experiences prove that there is sAkshi-pratyaksha of ajnAna.

Saushupta-pratyaksha of ajnAna

There has been a lot of confusion about sushupti. Some people hold that there is no ajnAna in sushupti, that there is pure AtmA in sushupti without any tinge of ajnAna etc. They derive their strength from some mantra of BrihadAraNyaka Upanishad and also from some shLOkAs of Naishkarmya Siddhi. We will see that this is completely out of place and contradictory to Upanishad and the intention of VArtikakAra.

1. Naishkarmya Siddhi quotes Upadesha SAhasrI in fourth chapter and says -सुषुप्ताख्यं तमोऽज्ञानं बीजं स्वप्नप्रबोधयोः। आत्मबोधप्रदग्धं स्याद्वीजं दग्धं यथाभवम्॥ Here, it equates tamas, ajnAna and sushupti. The very sushupti is equated to ajnAna.
2. After 57th shLOka of third chapter, AchArya clearly says -यदि हि सुषुप्तेऽज्ञानं नाभविष्यदन्तरेणापि वेदान्तवाक्यश्रवणमनननिदिध्यासनान्यहं ब्रह्मास्मीत्यध्यवसायात्सर्वप्राणभृतामपि स्वरसत एव सुषुप्तप्रतिपत्तेः सकलसंसारोच्छित्तिप्रसङ्गः । न च कैवल्यात्पुनरुत्थानं न्याय्यमनिर्मोक्षप्रसङ्गात् । न चान्य एव

सुषुप्तोऽन्य एवोत्थित इति शक्यं वक्तुं नाद्राक्षमहं सुषुप्तेऽन्यत् किञ्चिदपीत्युत्तितस्य प्रत्यभिज्ञादर्शनात् ।
तस्मादवश्यं सुषुप्तेऽज्ञानमभ्युपगन्तव्यम् ।

3. Once this statement is made that mandatorily one should accept that there is ajnAna in sushupti, the rest becomes clear. One can however ask, as Naishkarmya Siddhi posits - if there was ajnAna in sushupti, then why exactly it was not vividly manifest like it is manifest in jAgrat in the form of pratyaksha of rAga, dvesha and ghata-ajnAna. In jAgrat, it is clearly pratyaksha- घटम् अहं न जानामि. Similarly, there should have been अव्यवहित-प्रत्यक्ष of ajnAna in sushupti. However, that is absent - so, how can you say that there is ajnAna in sushupti! AchArya raises the question and answers - ननु यदि तत्र अज्ञानम् अभविष्यत्-राग-द्वेष-घट-अज्ञानादिवत्-प्रत्यक्षम्-अभविष्यत् यथा इह लोके घटं न जानामि-इति अज्ञानम्-अव्यवहितं-प्रत्यक्षम् । अत्रोच्यते । न । अभिव्यञ्जकाभावात् । कथमभिव्यञ्जकाभाव इति चेत् शृणु ।

बाह्यां वृत्तिमनुत्पाद्य व्यक्तिः स्यान्नाहमो यथा । नर्तेऽन्तःकरणं तद्वदध्वान्तस्य व्यक्तिराञ्जसी ॥ ५८॥

Just as there is no manifestation of ahamkAra without bAhya-vritti such as pot-vritti, similarly without antah-karaNa, there is no vyakti of ajnAna. So, there is ajnAna in sushupti, but since there is no abhivyanjaka, manifest-or of ajnAna in the form of antah-karaNa, there is no स्फुट-प्रतिपत्ति, clear vivid perception of ajnAna as it happens in the case of waking. Thus, AchArya categorically holds in Naishkarmya Siddhi that there is ajnAna in sushupti. As he said earlier - तस्मादवश्यं सुषुप्तेऽज्ञानमभ्युपगन्तव्यम् ।

4. This ajnAna is not some jnAna-abhAva rather it is bhAvarUpa-ajnAna and is abhAva-vilakshaNa. That is explained in the same chapter after shLOka 7. There the pUrvapakshI, the opponent asks - sir, ajnAna is nothing but jnAna-abhAva. And you are saying that ajnAna is the cause of anAtmA. How can that be? How can asat be the cause of anything! AchArya then takes up the example of sushupti and clarifies that

ajnAna is not asat like horns of hare! It is not jnAna-abhAva either. Rather, it is abhAva-vilakshaNa, bhAvarUpa-ajnAna. He says - अज्ञात एव सर्वोऽर्थः प्राग्यतो बुद्धिजन्मनः। एकेनैव सता संश्व सन्नज्ञातो भवेत्ततः ॥ ७॥ The shloka is basically saying that during sushupti, the entire world merges into bhAvarUpa-ajnAna. Before the manifestation of antah-karaNa, during sushupti, all objects remain ajnAta, unknown i.e. they merge with ajnAna-vishishTa-Brahman. They are ajnAta during sushupti because of their merger with ajnAna-vishsiTta-Brahman. They derive their very existence by being unified with ajnAna-vishishTa-Brahman.

5. Fine. However, in Naishkarmya Siddhi itself, in 62nd shLOka of third chapter, AchArya says - विक्रियाज्ञानशून्यत्वात्त्रेदं न च ममात्मनः । उत्थितस्य सतोऽज्ञानं नाहमज्ञासिषं यतः ॥ ६२॥ Here, it, *prima facie*, appears that AchArya is saying that there is no ajnAna in sushupti. However, since it has already been explained that there is ajnAna in sushupti, this ajnAna-shUnyatva of sushupti is explained as the absence of vyakta-ajnAna. Since there is no sfuTa-pratipatti of ajnAna in sushupti owing to absence of antah-karaNa, there is no kArya-adhyAsa. Even though kAraNa-adhyAsa is present, since kArya-adhyAsa like “I am ignorant”, “I am sad”, “I am happy” etc are not present. Hence, on account of absence of vyakta-ajnAna, the shLOka says that sushupti is ajnAna-shUnya. That is how it is reconciled. Chitsukhacharya clearly says - ननु कथम् अज्ञान-शून्यत्वं सुषुप्ते अपि अज्ञानस्य साधितत्वात् इति आशङ्क्य; तत्र अहमज्ञ इति स्फुटतर-व्यवहार-अभावात् तथा उच्यते.
6. Further elaboration is not provided in Naishkarmya Siddhi. Those we can find in VArtika and VivaraNa. I will just present a summary of that for completion of the topic. So, ajnAna, which is the material cause of this entire perceived anAtmA, is present in sushupti. It is sAkshi-bhAsya and not pramAtri-gamya. It is known by the sAkshI in sushupti through the vrittis of ajnAna. This knowledge of ajnAna by sAkshI

in sushupti is not vivid on account of absence of antah-karaNa, which is merged in ajnAna. This jnAna of ajnAna, after it perishes, produces a samskAra. After waking, that samskAra awakens and gives rise to recollection - I did not know then. This recollection is not possible unless the experience of bhAvarUpa-ajnAna is admitted. JnAn-abhAva cannot be known in sushupti because it is pramANa-gamya and pramANa-vyavahAra is impossible during sushupti. Further, at some places, sushupti is stated to not have ajnAna only on account of absence of vyakta-ajnAna.
